

## Treating the Gatekeeper as a Resource to Access Executives

By Dr. Steve Bistriz, President & Founder, [SellXL](http://www.sellxl.com)

The first gauntlet you run when trying to meet any executive is the system of roadblocks that are put in place to preserve their calendar or diary. You must find a path through these screens and filters, and then introduce yourself in a way that will persuade the executive to grant you a meeting. Roadblocks don't exist just to make life difficult for salespeople. Most of the time they're a legitimate mechanism put in place to help the executive focus on important tasks rather than distractions.

In some companies, getting calendar time with a senior executive may only take place if you contact the executive assistant or the executive's secretary. You simply can't get on the executive's calendar by contacting them directly. In that case, you may have to either use a sponsor or treat the gatekeeper as a resource to help you schedule a meeting with the executive.

The techniques that can be used to address them include:

- When there's an organizational change in your company, suggest having a meeting to explain the new structure.
- Suggest a meeting with an equivalent level executive from your organization (like-rank selling).
- Accept redirections to meet other executives or people of lower rank, but always ask for an introduction. to be made and request a follow-up meeting to review the outcomes.
- Schedule a meeting with an executive to communicate past value delivered or to confirm your ongoing value.
- When there's any significant event in the customer's market unrelated to the current sales campaign. Executives like to know that you're thinking about them, even if there's nothing for you to sell.

The stakes are high if you cannot access the *relevant executive* for the sales opportunity. Some of the latest data from companies whose sales cycles are nine months or more indicates that it can cost more than \$200,000 to pursue an opportunity, whether you win or not. That's a significant sum to bet on selling to low-level managers. If you don't have the chance to get past the gatekeepers and meet the *relevant executive*, it may be prudent to walk away, save the cost of sale and spend time on other opportunities where you have a better chance of winning the deal.

There's one other word of caution that bears mentioning at this point. Don't attempt to circumvent the gatekeeper unless you have a high degree of confidence that you can obtain the meeting with the executive. As one savvy salesperson put it: "*Hell hath no fury like a gatekeeper scorned!*" Once around a roadblock, a salesperson will be quickly tested. CXOs told us that salespeople who get past their roadblocks on a cold-call receive five minutes to show they can add value.

Here are some tips:

- Speak from a business perspective and don't get caught up in the "bells and whistles" of product features.
- Raise relevant questions and share business perspectives that are new to the executive - getting credit for the homework you've done on their organization and the knowledge and experience you bring to them.
- If you're an incumbent salesperson, point out potential limitations of your products in light of

changing demands, with ideas to make improvements, thus enhancing your credibility.

Try treating gatekeepers as though they were the executive. Explain your proposition and ask their opinions. By nature, they like assisting. The best Executive Assistants will be conversant with their boss's business issues and immediately see your value. The poor ones won't understand the discussion, but may pass you forward because you *sound* like you belong. If you are successful in obtaining a gatekeeper's support, make certain you keep them in the loop - it will serve you well in the long term.

### ***About the Author***

Dr. Steve Bistriz has more than 40 years of high-tech sales, sales management and training management experience. Steve co-authored the book, [\*\*\*Selling to the C-Suite\*\*\*](#), which was published by McGraw-Hill in 2010. He is president and founder of [\*\*SellXL\*\*](#), a global sales training and consulting firm, based in Atlanta. Visit his website at [www.sellxl.com](http://www.sellxl.com) or contact him directly at [steveb@sellxl.com](mailto:steveb@sellxl.com).